

Sustaining Employee Engagement during Organisational Change and Downsize

Institute of Directors, London
20th May 2009

In conjunction with...



Overview

On the 20th May 2009 at the Institute of Directors in London, 65 employee engagement experts from leading European organisations including CIPD, Virgin, HSBC, Accenture, Brita, Kodak, Air France, Sony, EDF, BP and Sodexo came together to take part in a 'best practice' brainstorm and exchange session. The challenge was to identify leading strategies and tactics to address sustaining employee engagement during organisational change, also to list common pitfalls to avoid during such programmes.

Outcome

The following pages list:

1. Specific strategies to build / sustain employee engagement during organisational change and downsize
2. Specific tactical elements that build / sustain employee engagement during organisational change and downsize
3. Pitfalls to avoid.

Summary

From a strategic perspective, having an effective well thought through plan with simple road map, associated communications plan, executive management buy in / support and the right team to handle change is a priority. Recognise that as much effort should be put into looking after those who remain as those leaving and/or the change process itself.

Tactically speaking; involving those undergoing change, fully preparing team managers to handle all situations and keeping an eye on the metrics (i.e. survival syndrome, engagement) is key.

Common pitfalls to avoid include lack of alignment across the organisation, inconsistent messaging, trust breaking down (informal communications take over), invisible management and a lack of appropriate metrics (i.e. employee engagement) at the programme onset.

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Specific strategies to build / sustain employee engagement during organisational change and downsize

- Clear business strategy
 - Where are we now, where are we going and why
 - Clear goals
 - Have a clear roadmap
- A comprehensive communications strategy
 - With detailed plan – but clear, simple, understandable
 - Two way communication – think building the outcome together
 - Incorporate feedback, see what changes are having an impact and how
 - Transparent, open, honest, two way. This should use a number of avenues, use multimedia and cascade - but don't solely rely on cascade as can alter down line
 - Consistent message over time and across organisation
 - Build strong mission statements that others can rally behind
 - Segment employees to ensure addressing their specific needs
 - Demonstrate high level buy in
- Risk management strategy
 - Build flexibility into the programme – expect the unexpected
- Rational change strategy
 - explain the purpose of change
 - all to understand where the change is going and why
 - clear goals
 - enable employees to help build the solution
- Genuine top management buy-in is essential
- Employ appropriate skills to deliver the change
 - Develop skills or buy in external experience
- Understand how you will retain and develop talent

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Specific tactical elements that build / sustain employee engagement during organisational change and downsize

- Support activities for those leaving and those remaining. Use employee assistance programmes, consider outsourcing this. Imperative to retain a good feeling.
- Gestures from senior management are key, must be sensitive to business activities.
- Utilise champions and Ambassadors, facilitate peer pressure.
- Find principles which bring people together that can be used during the downsizing process. This helps to deal with tension.
- Reinforce positive behaviour
- Deal with survival syndrome, ignore at your peril
- Internal / external benchmarking, find examples of best practice from elsewhere
- Social events or 'business as usual' event if you can't be seen to be spending money. Find cheaper things to do, such as sponsoring marathons.
- Measure levels of engagement objectively throughout the process – include survivor syndrome during downsize
- Review HR policies and procedures; for example, relax extended leave policy, part time working, job sharing i.e. win-win situations for employees and employers.
- Manage expectations
- Project working groups: getting people involved so they support what they create
- Leadership briefings: one large meeting and then several small follow up meetings to check that the message has really got through and so that you can see where communication is good and bad
- Management scripts and training – equip managers to deal with situation. Include role play pre-preparation and emotive speaking methods
- A learning map, a pictorial understanding of how they fit into the organisation and its future.
- How long should people stay or remain? Have a business strategy
- Embrace change from the top
- Social networking, open feedback
- Face to face review
- Stakeholder involvement
- Terms of reference agreed – 'Principles'
- Social events
- Internal / external benchmarking
- Feedback review meetings

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Pitfalls to Avoid

- Lack of alignment within senior management team.
- Lack of follow through: do what they say and say what they mean. Embed the change.
- Ineffective communication capacity
- Lack of flexibility
- Don't make assumptions
- Lack of trust in management - communication grapevine, water coolers etc. are very damaging. Unofficial leaders and influences **always** pop up.
- Mismatch between leaders and your goal. Continuity is key. Need visible people (senior management) on the ground
- Not dealing with emotions
- Don't ignore employee feedback or cherry pick the feedback that you like
- Invisible senior management team
- Miscommunication (head in the sand)
- Politics
- Lack of clear responsibilities
- Lack of training: be innovative, capture what people have in their real (outside of work) lives
- Don't ignore the legal's
- False promises, try to avoid having to take things back. Don't allow yourself to be manipulated, be aware of the grapevine.
- Lack of consistency, being credible professionally. Stick to what you say, and if you can't, then say that you can't.
- Misunderstanding the start point – know where you are to begin with. Do you have accurate employee engagement metrics before or at the start of the change process?
- Lack of preparation
- Unfair processes
- Information leaks
- Information cascade blocked and/or key messages altered